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ABSTRACT

This study examines the racial attitudes of Black, White, and Hispanic students in a Boston middle school. Group and individual interviews were conducted with two Black (both female), two White (1 male, 1 female), and two Puerto Rican (1 male, 1 female), students who are enrolled in a new middle school with a multicultural curriculum where bilingual and monolingual students are combined for most classes. The school is located in a Black and Hispanic housing project. Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by theme. The following findings are reported: (1) all students had first-hand experience as victims of racial hostility and, in some cases, racial violence in the outside community; (2) students discussed tensions they had observed in Black/White, Hispanic/Black, and Hispanic/White relations; (3) friendship choices in school reflected considerable racial and ethnic aggregation; (4) all students agreed that all groups got along in class; (5) five of the six students felt strongly about the importance of attending an integrated school; (6) each of the students evidenced some racial and ethnic prejudice; and (7) the negative attitudes of the Blacks toward their own ethnic identity contrasted with the positive attitudes of the Whites and Hispanics. The students' race consciousness was interpreted as a response to growing up in a race conscious community. Their longing for racial harmony is a reaction against the racial hostility that they perceived as a reality in Boston, although to a certain extent their own attitudes had been negatively affected. One reference and a copy of the interview guide are appended. (FMW)

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BLACK, WHITE, AND LATIN:
HOW STUDENTS SAY THEY GET ALONG IN BOSTON

Virginia Vogel Zanger
SED HS 600
December 10, 1983

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December 3, 1983

ABSTRACT

TITLE: Black, White, and Latin:
How Students Say They Get Along in Boston

PROBLEM: Racial conflicts in the Boston public schools are often ignored until they erupt into violence, at which point quick solutions are sought. Effective solutions must come from a realistic appraisal of the situation, and this study focuses on discovering the student perspective on interracial and interethnic relations. The key questions that were investigated were: 1) how do students perceive interethnic and interracial interactions, both at the school and in the larger society? 2) What are their attitudes toward the other ethnic groups and toward their own? 3) How do they feel about the multiethnic schooling experience?

METHODOLOGY: Two white, two Hispanic, and two black students at a Boston middle school were interviewed. The students are all participants in a new middle school program with a multicultural curriculum focus, where bilingual and monolingual students are combined for most classes. The school is located in a black and Hispanic housing project. Students were interviewed as a group and individually, during a total of 12 hours, using an interview guide. Interviews were tape recorded, transcribed onto a word processor, and then analyzed by theme.

FINDINGS: Students all had had first-hand experiences as victims of racial hostility, and in some cases, racial violence, in the outside community. Students discussed tensions they had observed in black/white, Hispanic/black, and Hispanic/white relations. However, in school, among the group surveyed, friendship choices reflected considerable racial and ethnic aggregation, and students agreed that in their class everyone got along. Five of the six students felt strongly about the importance of attending an integrated school. Yet there was some evidence of racial and ethnic prejudice among the students interviewed. The negative attitudes of the black students toward their own ethnic identity contrasted with the positive attitudes of the Hispanic and white students.

The students' race-consciousness was interpreted as a response to growing up in a race-conscious community. Their reaction against the racial hostility which they perceived as a reality of Boston is expressed as a longing for interracial harmony, although to a certain extent their own attitudes had been negatively affected.

INTRODUCTION

As a teacher in four Boston public schools in the years just prior to and following desegregation, I had found it hard to ignore the undercurrent of interracial and interethnic tension. But I tried. "I don't want to hear it," was my response to students' often disrespectful comments about each others' racial and ethnic backgrounds. My wishful thinking that racial conflict would go away if I just refused to pay any attention to it is a common attitude among other teachers and administrators. It is usually only when overt racial fighting breaks out that the problem is acknowledged openly and quick solutions sought. Clearly there are no easy answers to the tangled web of race and ethnic relations in Boston. However, in order to discover ways to untangle it, the first step must be to confront the situation squarely and attempt to analyze the nature of the problem. It was in this spirit that I decided to investigate that which I had been so intent on shutting out as a teacher: what it is that students think about racial and ethnic issues. This study, then, is an attempt to uncover the experiences, attitudes, and perceptions of six black, white, and Hispanic middle school students about interethnic interactions.

Ever since Bogardus (1933) tried out his social distance scale to test the attitudes of 100 Princeton students towards other nationalities, American researchers have tried to measure the cognitive, affective, and conative aspects of students'

racial and ethnic attitudes and behavior. Indeed, cited in the Supreme Court's landmark 1954 Brown decision that resulted in the desegregation of the nation's schools was Mary Ellen Goodman's study (1952) on racial preferences of black and white children. Since desegregation, many researchers have looked at the different social effects of desegregation: behavior, awareness, self-identification, and racial attitudes, including stereotyping, and social distance. 23 of these studies are summarized in St. John's School Desegregation Outcomes for Children (1975).

In the tradition of Bogardus' first study, the vast majority of work since then has attempted to quanitify both attitudes and behavior through a variety of scales (Triandis and Triandis), projective games (Porter, Goodman, Clark), tests (Williams), and codifiable questionnaires (Glock et al). The most popular method, used in 17 of the 23 studies reviewed by St. John, involves sociometry, a way of codifying student expressions of preferred companions for friends, play, and work. This method has been modified to study actual behavior by observing and tabulating students' seating choices at lunch (Schofield).

In contrast to the large body of quantitative research that focuses on one or two small indices of racial attitude or behavior in a large number of students is the work of Robert Coles and, in his footsteps, Tom Cottle. The approach of these researchers was to interview black and white schoolchildren in racially polarized situations to find out what it was like for them. Their approach is much more "emic" than the "etic"

nature of the quantitative studies. The qualitative work of Coles and Cottle illuminates the human cost of racial discrimination in our society. Moreover, it sheds light upon the complex phenomenon of racial attitudes by describing the contradictions often inherent in the attitudes and behavior of a single individual.

This study also examines the issue of students' interethnic attitudes from a phenomenological perspective. In contrast to an approach which deals with the complexity of the issue by narrowing the focus to one measurable index of racial attitude, this study addresses a range of questions in order to understand the complexity of students' attitudes. Students were interviewed in depth in order to discover their thoughts on certain key questions. How do they perceive interethnic and interracial interactions, both at the school and in the larger society? What are their attitudes toward other ethnic groups and their own? How do they feel about the multiethnic schooling experience? It is hoped that the answers presented here may help us to arrive at a better understanding of this issue which touches us all, despite out best efforts to ignore it.

METHODOLOGY

The Morris School, located in the midst of a black and Hispanic housing project in Boston, has a middle school program consisting of eighty students, six teachers, and an aide. Of the faculty, three are black, two Hispanic, and two white (one of these is bilingual). Students opt to attend the Morris School instead being assigned to a regular middle school in their district. There are approximately equal numbers of black and Hispanic students, with a much smaller percentage of whites. Only those Hispanic students whose English skills are high enough to enable them to take most classes with monolingual students are accepted into the program.

I chose the Morris School as the site for my study for two reasons. One was that the teacher who coordinates the middle school program is a friend, and I knew she was eager for research to be done on her program. When I broached my interest in studying racial attitudes among the students, she was most enthusiastic. Realizing how difficult it can be to gain access to the Boston public schools for research purposes, I knew that her helpfulness, as well as her assurance of the principal's cooperation, would be invaluable. Secondly, I was interested in the Morris as an innovative model for bilingual/bicultural education. It combines bilingual and monolingual students for all classes except Spanish, half the teachers are bilingual, and there is an emphasis on a

multicultural curriculum. Based on previous discussions with the teacher-coordinator, my impression was that the school represented an oasis of racial and ethnic understanding, in contrast to the tensions that characterized many Boston schools. I knew that the staff had consciously designed several features of the program to build racial and cultural awareness: optional Spanish as a Second Language classes for the non-Hispanic students, bilingual theatre arts productions celebrating the diverse heritages of the students, and a social studies curriculum that reinforced the multicultural themes of the theatre arts. Thus, my original intention was to document the ways in which the program had succeeded in building racial and ethnic awareness among students.

My first planning meeting for this study with the teacher coordinator of the program quickly disabused me of the notion that the school was a model of racial harmony. She voiced her concerns about what she perceived to be serious racial divisions, especially the emergence of racism on the part of some of the white students, and some black students' jealousy of the Hispanic students whom, she admitted, probably <u>were</u> favored by the teachers. I therefore decided to approach the topic less as an examination of the effects of the Morris curriculum on students' racial attitudes and more as an open inquiry into the racial/ethnic attitudes of six middle school students who attended a multiethnic Boston public school. As I interviewed the students and the complexity of their racial attitudes emerged, the correctness of changing my focus was confirmed. Although I did inquire into certain aspects of the

curriculum, it was clear that many more factors had influenced students' attitudes. I realized that it would have been simplistic to examine the students' attitudes in isolation from the context of the larger community.

Data Collection:

After my initial meeting with the teacher-coordinator of the program, I met with the principal of the school for close to an hour. Although extremely busy and difficult to contact, she proved most supportive of the study once I assured her that it would not be published nor the real name of the school used. I told her what my focus would be, and assured her that the students' schedules would be disrupted as little as possible, since I hoped to complete most interviews while the class was watching movies at the public library on Friday mornings. I mentioned my personal interest in studying students' racial and ethnic attitudes because, as a former bilingual teacher in the system, I was interested in bridging the gap between the bilingual and non-bilingual programs. That turned out to be one of her central concerns, albeit from a somewhat different perspective, and she proudly recounted her efforts to reduce black/Hispanic tensions among students and parents since becoming principal last year (the same year that the middle school program began at the school). "All for one and one for all" was a motto which she used several times during the interview, in summarizing her feelings about the importance of the bilingual and non-bilingual programs working together. She said that she had seen a marked improvement in race relations

in the school in the past year. According to her, "When I first came here, if a bilingual kid brushed up against a black kid, the fists would be up. We don't see that anymore. From one of the highest suspension rates in the city, we were down to three suspensions this year." She asked me to present my findings to the middle school teachers and administrators, which I said I would be happy to do, although I was careful to promise an oral, not written report, so as not to violate the individual students' confidences.

Following the principal's recommendation, I also met briefly with the assistant principal and the six teachers in the program in order to explain the study. I tried to present myself as a Boston teacher who appreciated what they were trying to do, and the fact that I had several well-respected friends on the staff added to my credibility I think. Whatever the reason, I was extremely pleased with the cooperation of both administration and staff at the school throughout my time there.

I asked the teacher-coordinator to select six students for me to interview. I requested students the same class, a male and a female from each of the ethnic groups in the program: black, white, and Hispanic. The school is highly tracked, and she was insistent on selecting students from the "highest" track, all but one eighth-graders. Interestingly, there were no black boys at all in that class, so I interviewed two black girls. The teacher-coordinator chose students whom she described as the most "articulate". She knew the focus of

the study and deliberately included a white boy whom she considered to be racist. The other five she spoke fondly of.

Over the course of the next month and a half, I spent approximately 12 hours interviewing students at the school and at the local library and accompanying them on a field trip. The interviews included a group interview of all the students but one, and one individual interview with each student. After the first interview in a supposedly empty teachers' room was interrupted several times, I asked the assistant principal to arrange for us to use an empty classroom, which he did. Some of the interviews were conducted in the reading room of the local library while the rest of the class was attending a movie downstairs.

For the group and the individual interviews, I used lists of questions as a way of structuring the conversation (a separate list of questions was used for the group and the individual interviews). These interview guides are included in the appendix. I was flexible as to the order in which I asked questions, and skipped questions if relevent information had already emerged. But because of the ages of the students and the fact that we didn't know each other, I felt more comfortable using an interview guide. Furthermore, I wanted to be sure to cover the same topics with all the students.

I also tried to encourage an open-ended interview, probing students on issues where they clearly had more to say. Thus, in the course of the first two interviews, students' comments led me to add two additional questions. The first student spoke about the importance of being "tough", and, upon my

urging, volunteered a definition as well as her ranking of the different ethnic groups on "toughness". I later asked the other students about their thoughts on this issue. During my second interview, a white boy declared at one point that he wished he could go to an all-white school and gave his reasons. In the subsequent interviews, I asked students if they would prefer attending an ethnically mixed school or one whose students were of their same background. These examples made it clear to me both the advantages and disadvantages of an open-ended approach, for additional interviews with each students would have been necessary had I included more student-generated questions.

All interviews were tape recorded, since I had trouble trying to both take notes and conduct the interviews in a sensitive way. After each session I wrote down some impressions in a journal. I later transcribed all the interviews on a word-processor. Then I organized all the material into twelve themes, clipped together in separate bundles, and left it for several days. When I sat down to write a draft of the Analysis section, I re-sorted the material into somewhat different categories, and, because of the fact that I had material from thirty single-spaced pages of transcripts, I obviously chose to eliminate some of the data from the final presentation. I felt that certain topics, while relevent to the concerns of the teachers at the school, were not really part of the focus of this study. Thus, students' opinions of the school in general and their reactions to the

multicultural social studies curriculum are not presented here, although I will discuss these findings with the staff later on. I was disappointed with how little the students had to say when asked about their perceptions of actual cultural differences they had observed, so I did not include their answers. Since this is an area of great interest to me, I learned that to elicit student opinions on that issue in the future, I will have to formulate more specific questions.

Establishing Rapport:

I knew from the outset that there might be certain difficulties in getting the students to open up to a stranger about what can be a very touchy subject, racial attitudes. I was concerned that they not give the socially polite responses, but instead talk about their true feelings. I was especially interested in building enough trust with the non-white students, since I myself am white, so that they would be candid with me.

Because of these concerns, I was careful to take certain steps which would, I hoped, build rapport. At the suggestion of the teacher-coordinator, I accompanied the class on a field-trip before I began my interviews. I was introduced by my first name, as a friend of the teacher-coordinator, although I made sure to spend my time with the students, not with her. After ten years in the role of a teacher, I found it both refreshing and something of a jolt to be just "Ginny". I found it initially difficult to restrain the teacher part of my personality, and even after I was used to relating to students in a different manner, I had to bite my tongue during one of

the interviews in order not to "correct" one of the white students' in what sounded to me like blatant bigotry. Yet I also felt that my new role was very liberating and enabled me to learn things that I doubt the students would have volunteered to me had I been their teacher. After an interview with Kirby, one of the black students, she said, "When are you coming back? I really like talking to you."

During my first group interview, I explained that just as they were working on a term paper, so was I, although instead of consulting books, I wanted to get my information from them. I said that I didn't think that there had been enough attention paid to what students had to say, and that their principal and teachers were very interested in hearing my report at the end. I promised that under no circumstances would I ever identify who said what. I asked them each to choose their own pseudonym, a suggestion which was very popular. During the first interview, I focused mainly on non-racial issues, such as reactions to the school in general, and although they were a bit bored by the time I got around to asking them about how they thought the different races got along, they seemed to be feeling very relaxed and open. Similarly, in the individual interviews, I sequenced my questions carefully, always beginning with unthreatening questions about where the student had attended school previously and working my way up to more sensitive issues. Students were much more frank with me individually than in the group, and overall I was pleased with how open they were. I enjoyed talking with the students

immensely.

The Students:

ANTOINETTE is an attractive blond, with clear blue eyes and a fast tongue. She will be 14 in a few months. Her father is Irish-American, her mother Italian-American, and both parents have remarried since their divorce when Antoinette was in the second grade. She has lived with both, and has gone to seven different schools since kindergarden. She comes across as direct, outspoken, and slightly mad at the world. She decided to switch from her original pseudonym, "Fallon", a character from the 'Falconcrest' television series, to "Antoinette Andretti" because she wanted something that sounded Italian.

JOHN is a wiry, outgoing Puerto Rican boy, with a quick mind and a ready grin. He is 14. Born in the continental United States, he went to Puerto Rico as a baby and was raised there until the age of 2. He has lived the rest of his life in Boston, in the housing project in which the Morris School is located. He is English dominant, and was reluctant to speak Spanish during the interview because he said he doesn't feel comfortable speaking in Spanish except with his family and friends, with whom he prefers to speak Spanish. He thinks that others won't understand his Spanish because he has been in Boston so long. At six, before he learned English, he had attended a monolingual English first grade, a confusing experience he remembers vividly. He then enrolled in bilingual programs from grades 2 through 6.

JOLEEN is a tiny girl with a pretty face behind very thick glasses. She is a reserved, self-contained, no-nonsense kind

of child, who doesn't smile or giggle much. Possibly because of her size, she gives the impression of being wise beyond her years, and it didn't surprise me when I walked into her class one day during an indoor recess period to see her sitting behind the teacher's desk up front while her classmates played. Her reserve may be due to her problems at home right now: raised in Chicago, by her mother but near her father's family, she is most unhappy to be living in Boston, in the projects, with her mother's mother, who sent for Joleen's mother but did not want her grandchildren to come along. She says her aunts treat her like a slave, and is longing for the day when she can return to Chicago. She is Puerto Rican, but has been there only once, when she was 8 months old.

KIRBY is a tall, slim, very pretty black girl. She is soft-spoken, but very sincere in her manner. The several times that I interviewed her, she was upset and bitter about incidents that had occured in school that day, in which she felt the teachers had picked on her. She said she wanted her mother to come up to the school to talk to the teacher, but she knew her mother wouldn't come because she had been injured in a car accident recently. She was also upset because her mother was moving the family back South the following month, to be with her own mother, and Kirby did not want to leave her friends. She is 13, and lives in the project near the school.

LOUIE is a tall, gangly, outspoken boy, the typical class clown, continually putting his foot in his mouth. He dominated the first group interview. At several points during the

interviews, he tried to make jokes about what he was saying, backing off from what he seemed to mean. Louie's parents are both from Italy, and often speak Italian at home. Although he does well in school, he says that he is planning to drop out when he is 16 to go to work in his father's construction company. He considers himself lucky to have such a good future ahead of him. He lives in Brighton, and the Morris is the fifth school he has attended.

PATTY is a sweet girl with a gentle manner, who chooses her words carefully. She is black. Although nearly 14, she is the only seventh-grader interviewed. She lost a year of schooling when her mother tried to transfer her into the Boston public schools from a parochial school because she felt Patty had been subjected to racial discrimination there, and it had taken the rest of the year for the transfer to go through. She was in an advanced work class at her previous school. She lives in the project near the school, and this is her fifth school since kindergarden.

ANALYSIS

Experiences of Racial Discrimination:

All six students had a lot to say about racial tension, for it was a fact of life that each, black, white, and Hispanic had experienced personally. While growing up in the Boston area during the court-ordered school desegregation crisis, all the students had been made acutely aware of racial prejudice and violence.

They told stories of their experiences as victims of racial hostility, such as the Kirby's tale of her vacation last summer (Kirby is black):

> In Springfield, me and my mother was staying at a motel, and we were driving back from the store, and took a wrong street. This white lady saw us and screamed, and she had been working in her garden, and she picked up a hoe and came after us. We started going faster. It was a good thing she didn't throw it. But we were <u>scared</u>.

Kirby felt the worst part of being black was:

> Racism. Being called names against your own color. Because they don't like each other now, some blacks don't like whites, and many whites don't like blacks. Like you can't go in certain neighborhoods. Some white can't go in black neighborhoods, and most every blacks can't go in white neighborhoods.

Another black girl, Patty, thought the worst thing about being black was "going into South Boston." And Antoinette, a white girl, talked about prejudice that she had faced:

> The first day that I was supposed to go to the Edison School, [her former school] the first friend that I made, she's black, she's a good kid, and then I went there and all these people look at you like, "Oh, she's white" and you feel discriminated against, and there's nothing you can do about it....You don't get as much trouble if you're

> Puerto Rican or black as if you're white, cause a lot of the white kids get a lot of trouble from a lot of people just because they're white. Especially like in Roxbury.

In the same school, Patty, a black girl, had felt discriminated against by a white teacher:

> ...in the Edison, there was a teacher, her name was Miss Town, and she was prejudiced against a lot of kids, called them names, as in a joking way, but I could tell that she was serious. She never picked the black kids to do anything. [She asked] all the white kids to do things for her. [She called us] nigger, burnt toast -- just in a joking way, just to make everybody laugh, but I knew she was serious about it. I told my mother about it. She went down and told the district office, they said they'd look into it. My mother switched me into another advanced work class so she wasn't my teacher no more.

And John, a Puerto Rican student, said he had often felt put down by Americans who didn't like him speaking Spanish:

> When I was in the second grade, when I used to talk in Spanish, they used to say, "Don't talk in Spanish,'cause this school's in English." We could talk Spanish in our room, but we couldn't talk it in the lunchroom, because there mostly was black and whites, and Puerto Rican, but they mostly talk in English. And in the bus, it was mostly black people and Puerto Rican people, and if people didn't knew English, they couldn't talk a lot, cause the black people didn't know what you'd be talking about.

The students all had witnessed discrimination against members of other groups. Antoinette, a white student, had observed white racism first-hand, for example:

> ...some people, if you see them walking down the street, some white people, they look like if you gave them half a chance, they'd spit on you if you're white and you're with Puerto Rican or black people. We all notice this. That's why some [black] people are prejudiced against some white people. But not all white people. I can't say they're prejudiced against all white people.

And Patty, a black student, described the racial hostility against whites in the housing project where she lives:

> Most of the white girls don't feel like they want to come around here. If any white person was to come around to the middle of the project, the black people and Spanish

> would jump them, have raids and all that, have fights....one [white] boy in this school, he was with a Spanish boy, and this other boy tried to come over there and start trouble. The Spanish boy jumped in and told him to leave him alone. Doesn't make sense. Just like when some black people went to East Boston and places like that, same thing would happen. So the black people aren't no different than the white people are....I don't know why they [whites] hate blacks. When the whites had the blacks for slaves, I never heard about a black having a white for slave, but there probably was. But we never learned about it.

Joleen, a Puerto Rican girl, also spoke about race relations in the same project, which is almost entirely black and Hispanic:

> Some of the black guys and Puerto Rican guys [in the projects] get along. But some of the black girls and the Puerto Rican girls don't get along. There was this other fight, a Puerto Rican girl with a black girl cause some black girls talk nasty things about Puerto Ricans, call them 'spic' and everything and the Puerto Rican girls don't like that name. And so they get mad. And if the Puerto Rican girls don't want to fight them the black girls force them to. Like my aunt, once this black girl came up to her face and slapped her and my aunt didn't do nothing and she told me that the next time if that girl comes and slaps her in the face she's gonna hit her back because that black girl she's tough.

Patty, a black girl who lives in the same project, offered further examples of hostility between blacks and Puerto Ricans there:

> The black people, they rule the Puerto Ricans in this project. Like there are hallways where just blacks live and hallways where just Puerto Ricans live, and there's a couple of white families, and they [blacks] say like if we ever had a raid, we're coming to the white families first. There's a white and black family in our hall, in our building. And they say to this boy Mark, 'if there's ever any raid, we're coming to your house first to get you.'

Yet other students who lived in the housing project saw evidence of black and Hispanic unity there. According to John, a Puerto Rican, who lives in the project:

> Where I live they don't talk about whites, cause there's only black people and Spanish people. But everybody there

gets along good.

And Patty, a black girl, talked about her Puerto Rican neighbors' relationship with her family:

> There's a family that lives downstairs from us. And they're nice, they send us up food, like when their mother makes Spanish rice and chicken, she'll send some up for us. And when my mother makes spaghetti, she'll send some down for them.

Kirby, another black girl who lives in the project also told of visits to the home of a Puerto Rican family who lived upstairs. Of black-Hispanic relations in the project, Kirby said, "They stick together."

Several students were convinced that there were a lot of racial problems was the local district high school. According stories that Louie had heard from his brother:

> There are a lot of whites that live in Brighton that go there [to the local high school] and they harrass the kids that come on the buses [black and Hispanic]. Like my brother [who is white]. He got such a dirty record -- he got expelled, you know. He told me some wild stories, they used to get these [black] kids that took his girlfriend's chain, and they asked him why he took it and he said, 'Cause I felt like it.' They were sitting at a lunch table, him and his black friends, so my brother, he called his white friends over and they fought it out. I don't mean to say nothing against the blacks, cause they'd do the same thing if my brother stole his girlfriend's chain. And so they killed him, you know, they beat him up real bad. And my brother took a trash can and smashed it over his head....My brother said those are the best years of his life. But he's not prejudiced no more, I just wanted to tell you that. He grew up.

Ethnic Relations in the School:

<u>Friendships:</u> Did the racial hostility the students had all witnessed in the outside world prevail in the school as well? I tried to find out by asking them each, in individual interviews, who were their three best friends. Their answers re-

vealed that, in contrast to the racial polarization which characterized their neighborhoods, their choices of friends reflected remarkable racial harmony. Five of the six students said they had close friends who were from a different ethnic group. Joleen, a Puerto Rican, and Patty, a black girl, each counted a black, a white, and a Hispanic as their three best friends. Kirby, a black girl, said her two best friends were black, but mentioned visiting a Puerto Rican girl's house and spending the weekend at the home of a white girl who had been at the school last year. Similarly, John, a Puerto Rican, was closest to another Puerto Rican, but had a black friend:

> My best friend, he's the smallest. His name is Chico. I known him since I was in the third grade, he was in the bilingual program with me, and we kept going to the same school, in the same class with me. Margarita [is another friend] and a non-bilingual, that's Noemi [black]. She's not prejudiced about Spanish, when she talks to us, she tries to learn Spanish, she talks to us in Spanish so she could learn Spanish. When we're talking to her in Spanish, she don't mind, she lets us talk to her in Spanish so she could understand some.

The friendship choices of the two white students reflected two very different patterns. Antoinette explained:

> I don't want to put them as best friends -- they're all just friends. But the ones I hang around with are Margarita Santiago, Myra [also Puerto Rican] and Moiji [also Puerto Rican]. During the plays is when we usually get together. I went over to Margarita's house before, and I went over to Wandi's house before, in the projects.

(O.C. During my interview with the principal, she told me that when the students gave evening performances of their plays at the school, which is located in the middle of the housing project, the students who lived outside the project usually ate dinner at the homes of their schoolmates who lived in the

project.) Antoinette continued:

> I'm not friends with very many white people at this school. I don't sit with them at lunch or nothing.

In contrast, although Louis said he had visited Puerto Rican students' homes, he didn't count them as his best friends:

> Everyone's my friend, I don't have no enemies. But my best friends? George [a white student]. I have a lot of good friends, but I wouldn't call them my best friends, you know. George is the only best friend I have in school. Cause the rest of them are all my friends, equal, you know, though some are more my friends than others. But I never have problems in the school, you know. But I can't say that I'd want them to be my best friends. Cause I have a lot of friends where I live [a white neighborhood in Brighton].

Students' Perceptions of Classmates' Prejudice: Another way that I attempted to elicit information about interethnic relations at the school was by asking students about it directly. In the first group interview I held, the students were reluctant to admit that there was any any prejudice among the students at the school. Everyone said that the black, white, and Hispanic students got along fine. Any conflicts, they insisted, were due to problems between the 'old' and the 'new', mostly sixth-grade, students. According to John:

> The old people sometimes gets along good, but the new people try to get in the old people's business. And the new people start to fight. And if we do something to the old people, we get suspended, we get in trouble. The principal get on our case, say how we should set an example for the new kids....[The problems at the Tobin] are not about that [prejudice], it's about the new kids want to be like the old kids, and they can't.

Louie concurred:

> There'll never be a year like last year again....I hate the sixth graders, they're always trying to start rumors, and talk trash and everything.

However, during individual interviews with the students, when I

asked if there was any prejudice among students at the school, everyone cited examples.

Black-White Relations: Black-white conflicts were mentioned by several students, and a lot of the hostility described had appeared in the context of arguments over the recent Boston mayoral elections between a black and a white candidate. According to Louie, a white boy:

> If there are a couple of black kids and they think Mel King he's the best and you say, 'Well, do you know all the facts about him?' they start saying, 'Man, you're prejudiced, you're prejudiced.' Just because you're not votin' for the black person. And then they start calling you names because you're white. And you call them a name back and then they say, 'See, you're prejudiced.' And I say, 'What do you mean I'm prejudiced? I wouldn't have said that if you hadn't said nothin' to me.' So you can tell they're prejudiced.

The two black girls, in separate interviews, raised their versions of the argument. According to Patty,

> A couple of people [are prejudiced]. Well, every time we're talking about the elections, Mel King and Flynn, this [white] boy he's always talking bad about Mel King and saying good things about Flynn. Every time I say that I think that Mel King should be elected cause he'll do a better job -- I still think Flynn will do a good job -- he says I'm just being prejudiced because he's my own color. And then I tell him if I had a chance to vote, I'd vote for Mel King. And you can see all the white people voting for Mel King too and I said all the people in East Boston are voting for Ray Flynn, cause he lives somewhere around there. And then he [Louie] always goes, 'You're just prejudiced.' And he goes he can't stand Mel King, and he tells me to my face that he can't stand him because he's black.

Kirby concurred:

> Like Mr. Jones [a black teacher] was talking to a student in level 4, talking about Mel King, and how Boston wasn't meant for Mel King, cause only the whites were mayors for Boston. So Louie didn't want Mel King and the teacher said, 'Louie, if a black and a white person were running for office [who would win]?' And a girl said the white person would get the job before the black person, and Louie, he didn't believe that, he thought that nothing was

wrong with that, he said, 'So what, it's obvious.' So that's the way he thinks. He thinks the whites should get it and there is prejudice in him.

According to some students, the black-white conflict in the class centered around two white boys. When I asked one of them, Louie, if he though there was any white students at the school who were prejudiced, he cited his best friend, George:

> Yeah. That kid George that I was sitting with. That tall kid. We're friends. But he is prejudiced. But sometimes the way he's prejudiced, he is funny, you know. He knows how to really talk back if somebody starts talking about us. We make a team, you know? Like if someone starts talking crap about him like I always have something to say to get that kid to stop or to feel cheap. And when someone's talking to me, George comes in and it's pretty good. That's why no one ever bothers us, cause we're the two biggest kids in the school.

Later, Louie gave me some of his views on the Puerto Ricans and blacks at the school:

> They don't act the way we do. They don't act normal. If you're talking and doing something private, like listening to earphones when the class is going on, they'll say something like, 'Oh, Louie, is that a Walkman you're listening to?' They do it on purpose, too, and it's even some of your friends, your black and Puerto Rican friends, they do it on purpose. And I say, 'Why do you have to do that?' And they go, 'I was just kidding around.' And I say, 'That doesn't help me none. Cause the teacher took my radio.' And I go, 'You should mind your own business.' Cause they never mind their own business. They're always looking for something to talk about, they're always looking for gossip.
>
> You can't talk about their race, but they can talk about yours. Like you can't say nothing like, 'you nigger' or nothing like that. Or like a Hershey bar or something like that. They'll come at you and say something like, 'You're a cracker, you honkie' and crap like that. But when you say something back to them, they say, 'See, you're prejudiced.'
>
> That's why I can't stand them [black kids]. They're always trying to show off and be like other people. You know, like now they're starting to talk Puerto Rican. They don't even pronounce the words right. They're trying to talk like 'Sientate' [sit down in Spanish] and stuff like that and they're trying to act cool and they don't

make it.

Patty, a black girl, thought that Louie was prejudiced:

> ...when we talk about slavery and things, I'll say, 'Who do they [whites] think they are enslaving everybody but themselves?' And then after, Louie says, 'Some of the black people slaved the black people, and some black people slaved white people.' Well, I didn't think that was true. So, I just told him I didn't want to talk about it, cause every class we got in, he would mention it to the teacher. And then it would be a debate. There's one more white kid that feels that way. He's always on this other person's side. Talking about black people, calling them niggers. He called me one before.
>
> The black people go against whites because way back in slavery, that's why they can't get along. They [the black people] always bring up slavery, and they -- both of them -- they just don't get along.

Kirby, a black girl, thought the main conflict in the school was caused by "white against black and white against Spanish. But," she concluded. "There's a lot [of white kids] and Spanish that get along with black and white. It's just a small number that can't."

Other students were also careful not to give too simplistic an answer to a question about how well the students get along at the school. Joleen answered this way:

> Some of them [do get along]. My class does. Mostly sixth graders have fights and arguments. Sometimes they think they're prejudiced. In Mr. Gray's room, there's this white kid. Mr. Gray gave him a piece of paper to throw away the gum and he did it. So then this black girl she started saying things about him and then he said to shut up and then she said she don't like no white boys. And this Puerto Rican girl said, 'What, are you prejudiced?' And she said no, she just don't want to go out with white boys.

And Antoinette observed:

> I see a lot of people pick on this girl Debbie. She's in our school, she's shy, quiet, and they pick on her. She's white. And a lot of black people defend her, because a lot of people pick on her. A lot of black people pick on her, a lot of black people defend her because she's white,

because she never does anything to nobody.

Antoinette also felt that she herself had been stigmatized somewhat for being white:

> You're always being compared to blacks. If you wear your hair one way, and a black girl wears it another way, [you're asked] 'why don't you wear your hair the way that girl does?' Saying that the white girl should wear it the way the black girl does. Cause you're in their territory now. I mean, that's like go ask a black person how they feel living in the suburbs, in an all-white suburb.

Hispanic-White and Hispanic-Black Relations: Some resentment against the Spanish-speaking students also became apparent from the remarks of some of the black and white students. Louie, a white student, complained, "They [Puerto Ricans] think they're so hot. They think they're the number one race." And Kirby, a black girl, declared, "I'm sick of looking at Spanish. In Roxbury, the majority is Spanish." Patty, another black girl, maintained:

> [The blacks and the Puerto Ricans] they get along. But those are the main people who are always talking about somebody. Those Spanish girls. They think they're cute. Just because their hair's nice and smooth and long. They talk about the black people's hair and all that....Some of the black kids don't like the Spanish kids or white kids. I'm not taking their side, but they can be jealous against the Spanish people too. They could all be jealous against each other. [Of their] long hair, make-up -- you know how the Spanish people wear make-up and all of that -- clothes. Mostly why.

Joleen, a Puerto Rican, concurred on jealousy as a source of resentment:

> Some of the whites they're conceited and everything and they think the white are the best and everything. Some of them get jealous because there's Puerto Rican girls that dress up nice and some of the white girls get jealous cause they don't got none of the clothes the other girls have. Some of the black girls dress up nice. But they think mostly Puerto Rican girls dress up nice.

Kirby, a black girl, sounded especially vehement when she said:

> In this school, is too many [Puerto Ricans]. That's what the blacks talk about in this school. Some people don't like it. Cause of the language. And the crowdedness, it's overpopulated with Spanish. The majority in this school is Spanish, from the first up to the eighth. You'll see a couple of Chinese children, but it's mostly Spanish in this school. Because the projects, has a lot of Spanish. And when they fix the [abandoned] buildings up, there's going to be even more Spanish coming to this school, and it's going to be overpopulated. That's why I say in December, I hope they start transferring people, cause I want to be transferred.

And the hostility had not been lost on John, a Puerto Rican, who said:

> Some Puerto Ricans say the blacks think they're better than us, they got more better things than we do, that they walk better than us, that they can get more girlfriends than us, that they can get everything better than us.

On the other hand, some students saw a lot of unity among the blacks and the Hispanics. Joleen, who is Puerto Rican, said:

> ...they get along fine because some blacks think Puerto Ricans are black too. Because they speak English. And because there are some black Puerto Ricans. So they get along fine.

Patty also thought blacks and Puerto Ricans got along well, and offered a similar analysis: "...most Hispanics are close colors with black people. And I think black and Hispanic are closer [than they are with whites]."

Joleen also felt there was more hostility between some Puerto Ricans and whites than there was between Puerto Ricans and blacks:

> Some of the Puerto Rican kids don't like white kids cause sometimes they smell, and sometimes they don't like them because they smoke. Sometimes they don't like how they act. Like if they act like they're so bad [tough]. And other Puerto Rican kids don't like it when they act like that because if they get into a fight, the guy that thinks he's so bad he gets him into a fight.

However, she concluded: "I get along with them [whites]. I don't care if they're black, Chinese, or Puerto Rican or white. I just get along with them.

Teacher and Administration Bias: Several of the students were upset at what they perceived to be the pro-Hispanic bias on the part of some teachers and administrators. They talked about it in both the group interviews and individually. For example, Kirby, a black girl, felt that Hispanics got preferential treatment from teachers:

> Some teachers treat the students different....That's why some of the teachers have something to do with some of the students not liking other students. Some Spanish. And there's a couple of blacks that can get away.
>
> Mr. Jones [a black teacher] let them [Puerto Rican students] do everything, like today, when we was in the movie. There was 6 or 7 Spanish behind us, and 6 black persons in the next row, and Mr. Jones came over to us and said, 'Y'all better shut up and watch this movie.' And they kept makin' all this noise, turning around, hitting each other, you know--playing, and we was just sitting there and if one person want to say something to me I'd answer their question, but I'd whisper. But if he sees us doing that he'll get mad and say something to us. But there's certain people in our class, Rosita and Pablito, now he won't even say nothing to 'em. Now that's not fair.

Kirby also felt that the school principal was biased against blacks. She had recently been involved in an incident in which a black and Hispanic girl were fighting, and she said, "Say if me and a Spanish girl was in a fight, and we were both fighting each other, I'm gonna get suspended, just like what happened yesterday!"

In a similar vein, Louie, a white student, complained that a white teacher, Miss Lester, favored Hispanics:

Miss Lester, she's always talking about how great blacks

> and Puerto Ricans are. She never gives us no credit....She makes the white kids feel like dirt. Some whites aren't bad. There are a lot of white good people. A lot.

John, a Puerto Rican, agreed:

> What Louie says is right. When you [Louie] go tell her something, she's arguing with you, says 'I don't want to hear about it. Drop it.' But if it's somebody Puerto Rican, she says, 'alright.'

However, in a private interview, Antoinette, a white student, disagreed:

> ...one of our teachers at this school, she's white, she's prejudiced against a lot of white people. But that's not really true. She likes to stick up for Black people and Puerto Ricans, and Chinese, she sticks up for their rights, and she does stick up for our rights, you might not see it, but she does.

Views on Multiethnic Schooling:

Because the students described so vividly some of the racial tensions both within the school and in the outside world, I wondered how they felt about attending such a multiethnic school. In the individual interviews with each student, I asked them if, given the choice, they would go to an ethnically mixed school or one with students from just their own background. Five out of the six felt strongly about the importance of going to a school that was mixed. Their reasons show the extent of how important they thought it was for the different ethnic groups to learn to get along. Three of the students explicitly condemned prejudice. Kirby explained:

> I'll go to a mixed school [if I had a choice]. Because if you just to to the black school there's some white people won't like it and they'll try to intrude on us. That's why I wouldn't go to an all-black school if I had a choice. 'Cause I don't want to be prejudiced. 'Cause if I'm in a school with all blacks, obviously I'm gonna turn against the whites, the Puerto Ricans, the Jews. I will turn against them.

It'd cause a lot of problems because in a black school, they'd start going against whites, the whites and the Spanish, and then it's just going to be chaos, fights, and it's going to be a riot, there will be one. Because they don't like each other now....

And Patty gave a similar reason:

[I would prefer a school that is] mixed. Because you'd get a chance to get along with all colors. I don't know why people always going with racism. There's no difference -- y'all human, y'all just a different color. Skin's just a different color is all. They just think bad about each other.

Antoinette's answer is especially interesting, because she had previously attended all-white suburban schools and had been sickened at the prejudice she saw:

[I would choose] Boston schools. For friends. Because I've experienced both, and I've come to think about the all-white schools -- they're conceited, they're so stuck-up and so prejudiced.

Because in Randolph, that's where I remember the best, there was only one black kid in the school, and I'm not saying this to offend the Jewish, but there were a lot of Jewish girls in that school and they were conceited against the Spanish and blacks.

'Cause I remember I went on the field trip to George's Island, and there happened to be another class. And all they [my classmates] did was talk about it, and I got so mad, I wouldn't talk to these girls that were in my class....they talked about the other kids as if they were animals. They kind of put them in a class where the girls from the suburbs were way up on a higher level and the kids from the city were all down here. They think everyone's poor in the city, they think everyone's a hood....And I'm trying to tell them.

It made me sick. I mean, how can they talk about these people when you don't even know them? If some of my old friends, if I ever took them to Boston, forget it, they'd be scared stiff, they'd want a police escort wherever we went.

Most of the students were also strongly in favor of integrating the bilingual students into the all-English classes, in contrast to the separation of the two programs at many schools. Patty, a black student, described the problems

caused by segregating the bilingual students at her previous school:

> They [the bilingual students] weren't even on our floor, they were under us. We never got a chance to talk in school, only in the projects. [The non-bilingual students] always wanted to compete against them [the bilinguals] like in soccer games, basketball, they wanted to compete against the bilingual classes. And most of the black kids and the white kids in the regular class, they wanted to fight the bilingual kids at recess and things like that. They wanted to beat them up. [But not at this school] 'cause they all mixed up.

And John, a student who had been in the bilingual program at the same school that Patty described, concurred:

> I knew some people that knew English, some of them. But almost all of them that I knew, they speak Spanish. About half of the school was bilingual, and we never went over to the regular side, we didn't went down to take classes with regular people, we just took English with the same class.
>
> The people that didn't know Spanish wanted to play kickball, but the Spanish people didn't. They used to argue a lot. And when we used to go to the lunchroom, I knew English, but I used to talk Spanish with my friends, cause I didn't know too much people....
>
> The bilingual people thought that we should mix the class so that they could learn Spanish and we could learn English. Because we used to go to different classes, but next to us, in Spanish, all bilingual. If you wanted to go to regular, you had to walk up the stairs, and there's a whole floor of regulars.
>
> [I like it the way it is at this school] 'cause when we get classes all mixed together, we know each other better, cause it's small.

And despite Kirby's complaints about Hispanics, she was pleased to have the opportunity to learn Spanish at school:

> ...when I was at the Edison, they didn't give no one Spanish but the Spanish kids. And that's how it's different from here, because they give a lot of kids the opportunity to learn Spanish. I'm taking Spanish because I took it last year and I want to learn more. Because I have Spanish teachers and all the students talk in Spanish and I want to know what they're saying too....But I can't understand them because they talk too fast. And I'm just beginning!

The bilingual students also felt it was important for the

non-Hispanic students to be learning Spanish. Joleen explained why:

> Because if there's a lot of Puerto Rican girls talking in Spanish, and there's a black girl or a white girl standing there she'll know a little bit if she's surrounded by Spanish girls, she'll understand it. Some of the white girls want[ed] to take French or Italian or Greek and they decided to take Spanish because they were surrounded by Spanish girls.

And John concurred:

> ...we [the bilingual students] got to take Spanish the whole year, and the non-bilinguals don't have to. But some of them do. That's good, cause some of them can learn two languages. Their own language and a different language. If they're talking to someone who don't know English, they can talk to them in Spanish.

In his previous schools, John had been in an all-English class as well as in a separated bilingual program and saw problems with each. He preferred the Tobin model:

> Because I could learn more English that I don't know. English and Spanish together, so I won't forget Spanish. Because if I take all Spanish, I might forget English.
>
> The way it's set up [at the Tobin] it's good because you don't got to be separate from each other. You can talk to your different friends and you don't got to go walk different ways to meet them, and you be all together in one group.

In sharp contrast to these affirmations of the importance of multiethnic schooling is the following declaration by Louie:

> I'd rather go to a school that's all white, to tell you the truth. Because they're like you, you know how they act. I mean, because they live in your neighborhood, they live in the same kind of area you live in. And they like the same things you like.
>
> But going to a school that's Puerto Rican, black, and everything, mixed with white -- there's only six or seven whites in this school, you know, and they're even starting to act Puerto Rican except for me and George. Like this girl named Antoinette, she's trying to act black and Puerto Rican. Like she's trying to talk Spanish and everything. Like she's going, 'Oh, mira, mira' [look in Spanish] and all that other stuff. Maybe that's the way she wants to act, but I don't know. I have no complaints,

if she wants to act that way.

Feelings about Their Ethnic Identity:

In the context of their multiethnic surroundings, how did the students feel about their own ethnic backgrounds? In individual interviews, I asked the students if they were proud to be what they were, and what ethnic group they would choose to be born into. Their answers varied markedly. Both John and Joleen, the two Puerto Rican students, both replied immediately that they would want to be born Puerto Rican. But John specified that he would rather be a Puerto Rican living in Boston than on the island:

> I think it's good that I came to Boston cause I knew more people, get along with different people. But in Puerto Rico, everybody knew the same people, the same language they spoke, but right here, I heard some different languages.

Patty, a black student, also said she would like to be born as a Puerto Rican. Her reason was "cause most of the time, Puerto Ricans get along with the white and the black. And a similar theme was echoed by Antoinette, a white student, who said that if she could choose,

> I'd be born a mix. Of Puerto Rican and black, some white. I like to speak Spanish, I like their language, I'm sick of American. And you don't get as much trouble if you're Puerto Rican or black as if you're white, cause a lot of the white kids get a lot of trouble from a lot of people just because they're white. Especially like in Roxbury.

Antoinette also expressed pride in her ethnic heritage:

> I'm proud that I'm Irish and Italian. Cause that's what I am and if I was meant to be anything else I'd probably be that. And it's my family. It's what I am. And I should be proud of it. Nobody can tell me otherwise.
>
> I want to learn what I am, why I'm here. I mean, if my great-grandfather had been a farmer instead of a butler, I could be over in Palermo now. The immigrants research paper [which she did on Italians] got me interested, plus

a lot of people know what their families have done, and me, I don't, cause it's hard going from Irish to Italian, so I decided I'd stick with Italian, cause Irish, it's too crazy, like with my family from Ireland, I'd be going over.

A most striking contrast was revealed by the answers of Louie and Kirby. Louie said,

> Yeah, I'm glad I'm Italian. I like my background. Mafia -- I like them on my side. The country's nice, Italy. I seen a lot of pictures. The next time my parents go, they're gonna take me.
>
> There's not one disadvantage to being Italian. I'm telling you -- what can they say? They can say guinea, wop. That doesn't do nothin' to me. If they say guinea, I have something worse to say to them. But that's about the only thing they have to say.
>
> ...I'm glad I wasn't born -- not that I'm prejudiced -- a black or a Puerto Rican. They have it rough, you know. I couldn't hack it.

In contrast, Kirby, a black student, could not identify what was the best thing about being black for her. She hesitated when asked if she was proud to be black. Finally she said, "What can you do about it? You gotta put up with it. I have to live with it."

SYNTHESIS

Although the students were, in fact, prompted to give their views on race and ethnicity, it was somewhat surprising to me to discover just how much they had to say on the subject. But upon later reflection, I realized that it is probably naive to assume that just because students appear to get along well with each other in a multiethnic school environment, that preoccupations with ethnic differences and even racist ideas will disappear from their thinking. That race and ethnicity should be on their minds is natural for several reasons.

First of all, one of the consequences of introducing junior high school age students to a multicultural curriculum and environment is that many of their pre-adolescent and adolescent concerns and insecurities are expressed around the question of race. The tendency of children of that age group to tease, boast, and compete belies anxieties that many have about their own identity and about fitting in. In a multiethnic situation, the name-calling predictably takes on racial tones. Early adolescence is a time when the individual first begins to consciously forge an identity independent of his parents, and the security of the peer group is all-important. Thus it is a time of heightened sensitivity to in-group/out-group issues, which often encompass racial and ethnic differences. For Louie to fully reject the racist mores of his older brother and neighborhood peer group would probably be too threatening to him psychologically right now. Secondly, the students' concern with racial issues reflects the reality of

their larger environments. All live in neighborhoods that are quite race-conscious, in a city that has been plagued by racial strife for the past ten years. Their first school experiences took place in the midst of the highly publicized desegregation crisis of the Boston Public Schools, which served to fan the flames of the most racist elements in the city. Thus, it is not surprising that the racially charged atmosphere of the city had not escaped the students' notice. Indeed, its impact is to be expected, given the students' own first-hand encounters with racial prejudice.

The data presented here reflects the students' struggle to deal with the realities of the racial climate of their neighborhoods, schools, and of American society. I think that their comments must be seen as reactions to these realities.

One reaction to society's racial discrimination is reflected dramatically in the students' feelings about their own ethnic identity. Kirby's bitter statement about her blackness, "What can you do? You have to put up with it?" recognizes the institutionalized racism of a society which victimizes blacks and Hispanics in jobs, housing, education, and health. Even Louie, who wasn't willing to give blacks much credit for anything admitted that "they [blacks and Puerto Ricans] have it rough, you know. I couldn't hack it." The fact that neither black student felt comfortable with their racial identity corresponds with the findings of many psychological studies which have concluded that even by the age of five:

> ...many Negro children of this age are already aware of the prejudices of whites, and that they share these

feelings to such an extent that they are at best highly ambivalent about the racial attributes of the self.

Similarly, Antoinette's desire to "be born a mix" in part stems from her experience as a white in a majority black and Hispanic environment, from which she concluded, "And you don't get as much trouble if you're Puerto Rican or black as if you're white." However, Antoinette was also clearly proud of her own ethnic heritage, while both black girls were at a loss to identify any positive aspects of theirs.

Another way in which the general atmosphere of racial hostility seems to have influenced the students can be seen in the racial bias and intolerance of some of their remarks. Louie's long list of complaints about Puerto Ricans and blacks who "...don't act like we do. They don't act normal" would seem to correspond to the kinds of attitudes he must have heard from his brother, who allegedly had been expelled from the high school for racial fighting. The fact that several of his classmates pointed to his prejudiced behavior -- as well as his choice of an admittedly bigoted white boy for a best friend -- would seem to indicate that the racist attitudes of his white neighborhood had affected his attitudes. Similarly, Kirby's hostile remarks about Puerto Ricans, whom she was "sick of looking at", echo some of the black-Hispanic tension in the project which some of the students had described. However, it would be a mistake to take Kirby's and Joe's remarks at face value and characterize them both as rabid racists, for there are contradictions in each's attitudes. Far from rejecting her Puerto Rican classmates out of hand, Kirby was eager to learn

Spanish because "I want to know what they're saying." And throughout the group interview, Joe's non-verbal behavior belied his words: he was constantly putting his arm around Kirby, a black classmate, and giving her a friendly hug.

The third way in which the students seem to have been affected by the racial climate of the society as a whole is in their vehement and repeated condemnations of racial prejudice. Kirby's plea, "I don't want to be prejudiced", Patty's declaration, "[racial violence] doesn't make sense", and Joleen's statement that "I don't care if they're black, Chinese, or Puerto Rican or white. I just get along with them" must be taken in the context of the pervasive racial hostility that each had witnessed personally. Unlike the pious homilies about the need for of racial harmony that can be overheard in lily-white environments, these declarations should be interpreted as reactions against the ugliness of racial tension as witnessed by each student. All the the students but one were struggling to resist the racist poison all around them.

What struck me the most about the data I collected, when taken as a whole, was the longing for racial harmony that the students expressed both consciously and unconsciously. In addition to Kirby's, Patty's, and Joleen's condemnations of prejudice, all the students except Louie felt strongly about the importance of integrated schooling as an antidote to racial hostility. The fact that Louie was the only one who didn't see the importance of learning to get along with all ethnic groups probably reflects the greater possibilities that white people in our society have to escape from racial tension. The other

five students were quite articulate about the reasons why they would choose a mixed school. As Patty said, "Because you'd get a chance to get along with all colors....I don't know why people always going with racism." Antoinette's revulsion at the racism she perceived in the suburban schools she had attended is another example of the conscious anti-racism of most of the students. Finally, the interethnic friendships reflect the students' resistence to the racist mores of the society at large.

The wish of four of the students to be born Puerto Rican also expresses a desire to remove themselves from the polarization of black-white relations because, in their perception, "...most of the time Puerto Ricans get along with the white and the black." It is interesting to note the way students characterized the position of Hispanics as somewhat outside the animosity of whites and blacks. The friendship patterns revealed the buffer status of the Puerto Rican students as well: there were more Puerto Rican/black and Puerto Rican/white friendships reported than there were black/white. What accounts for the partial exemption of Hispanics from the black-white hostilities? For one thing, the fact that Puerto Ricans have only moved to Boston in significant numbers in the last twenty years means that they played no part in the long and bitter history of black-white conflict. Another explanation might be that the school has a consciously pro-bilingual tone, which may give special status to Hispanics, although it seems to be causing some resentment

among other students as well.

The extent to which the school itself has influenced the students' anti-racist attitudes cannot be determined from the data, but it can be speculated that it played at least some role. It is likely that the cordial relations between the monolingual and bilingual students at the school, and the positive attitudes expressed about the Spanish language, are due to the faculty's encouragement of all students to be bilingual. Although all Boston public schools are subject to the federal court desegregation order, few in my experience take responsibility for promoting ethnic understanding through serious curriculum efforts, as does the Morris. All of the students interviewed had studied the history of blacks, native Americans, Caribbean peoples, and immigration of different ethnic groups to the U.S. in their social studies classes and then interpreted those histories through performances of songs, dances, and plays. And according to the principal, these efforts had paid off in dramatically reducing the number of suspensions for fighting and the level of black-Hispanic hostility at the school.

Implications:

To explore how much the Morris students' racial and ethnic attitudes are, in fact, due to the school's innovative curriculum, it would be revealing to interview students at other Boston schools and compare their racial attitudes. I would expect to find the sharpest contrasts between the Morris and other middle schools when comparing the bilingual / monolingual interactions, judging from the students'

descriptions of the antagonisms they had witnessed in their former schools in which the bilingual and monolingual classes had been completely separate. It would also be interesting to interview students in racially isolated school situations, such as those that Antoinette had attended in the suburbs, to find out if, as she asserted, prejudice is more rife where white students had little personal contact with minorities. I suspect that students in affluent suburban school systems may express fewer blatantly hostile comments, and be less racially conscious, but their naivete might also cause them to believe more outlandish racial stereotypes. Because of the interethnic friendships, the multicultural curriculum, and the generally positive interactions at the Morris, it would seem that those students would be in a better position to see through the racist ideas so pervasive in our society. Finally, I would suggest that the data from this study be expanded with further fieldwork concentrating on more participant observation. Since this study was limited almost entirely to interviewing students about their attitudes and perceptions, it would be most valuable to see how these correlated with actual behavior.

What are the implications, for educators, of the data presented here? At the most basic level, they remind us of just how racially charged is the larger community, and how much students are influenced by those tensions. To ignore them and to assume that students will automatically leave their hostilities outside as they walk in the front door of school every morning is, it would seem, a dangerous mistake. On the

other hand, the contrast between the overt hostility of the larger community and the generally positive interethnic interactions at the Morris School is encouraging and shows the possiblities for building interethnic understanding through the schools. In considering effective strategies to do so at the middle school level, it would be useful to keep in mind the students' lively interest in ethnic differences and similarities, as evidenced by their comments here. Instead of ignoring their interest in ethnic differences, the curriculum should capitalize on it and help students to see differences positively.

It might be useful for other schools to study the Morris School's successful integration of bilingual and monolingual students, but it should be cautioned that the model is applicable in only certain situations. The bilingual students who benefitted from the Morris program were those who were already proficient in English. To integrate less proficient bilingual students that extensively into a monolingual program would be to short change them academically. Moreover, it would seem that the favorable attitude toward Hispanics on the part of other Morris students had to do with more than mere scheduling: the availability of Spanish classes, the multicultural curriculum, the bilingual theatre arts, and the bilingualism of the faculty probably all contributed as well.

Finally, the students' comments should serve as a reminder to educators of the important effect that our own racial attitudes can have. Students in a racially charged atmosphere

like Boston are extremely sensitive to evidence of bias, and the five students who brought up examples of what they perceived as prejudice on the part of teachers or administrators were quite bitter about it. Conversely, it cannot be overemphasized how important is our role as teacher or administrator in creating an environment where, in Kirby's words, the students can have "a chance to get along with all colors."

FOOTNOTES

1. Mary Ellen Goodman, The Culture of Childhood (New York: Teachers College Press, 1970), p.38.

APPENDIX

Interview Guide Used in Individual Interviews

1. Tell me all the schools you have ever gone to. Did they have bilingual programs there? Was it set up like the Morris? Which do you think is better? Why? Was there a bilingual program set up like this one? How was it different? How did the bilingual and monolingual students get along?

2. Do the kids in your class at the Morris get along? Can you give me any examples?

3. Why do you think that is?

4. Do you think there's any prejudice or discrimination among any of the kids at this school? Can you give me any examples?

5. Can you tell me who your best friends are at this school? Are they black or white or Hispanic? Did you have any ___ friends before you came to this school?

6. What do you think the _____s think of the _____s at this school?

7. What do you think of the _____s? The _____s?

8. Do you think they're the same as you?

9. Do you think there are any differences you've noticed? What are they?

10. Which group do you think is tougher? What do you mean by tough? Do you think that's a good thing to be?

11. What kind of things do the _____ kids say about the ___. If I were to overhear a conversation between two ____ kids talking about _____, what kinds of things would they say?

12. If you could go to a school that was just students from your own background instead of mixed like this one, would you? Why?

13. If you were a baby about to be born, where would you pick to be born -- what country?

14. If you were going to be born in Boston, would you rather be born black, white, Hispanic, Vietnamese, West Indian? Why?

15. Since coming to the Morris, having you gotten to know more about your roots? Like what? How about other groups?

16. Are you proud to be ____?

17. What do you think is the best thing about being ____?

18. What do you think is the worst thing about being ____?